

**Division of Fisheries and Habitat Conservation**  
***Partners in Fisheries and Habitat Conservation Award***

Recipient for Pacific Region: Steve Smith  
Title: Private Lands Biologist  
Affiliation: USFWS, Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge

**Project Description.**

Steve Smith has been the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Private Lands Biologist since 2003. He is the lead on the Willamette Valley Private Lands Habitat Restoration and Recovery work. During his three year tenure in this position, he has developed effective partnerships with a multitude of private landowners, with agencies on all levels, with conservation groups, and many other stakeholders to energize a natural community approach to habitat restoration. He has been the driving force behind several innovative agreements, including an MOU with the Oregon Dept of Fish and Wildlife to share equipment to improve ability to provide cost effective assistance and services to private landowners and a MOU and contract with NRCS to implement the Wetland Reserve Program for the Willamette Valley.

**Benefits to Trust Resources.**

Steve's efforts have been responsible for combining charismatic partnership development and the program strength of Partners for Fish & Wildlife (PFW) to focus on restoring globally imperiled habitats to aid in the recovery of federally threatened and endangered species. His efforts have resulted in PFW projects which (between 2003-2005) have restored more than 1000 acres of oak savanna and prairie to benefit listed species such as Kincaid's lupine and Fender's blue butterfly; over 500 acres of wetland to benefit such species as Nelson's checkermallow, Oregon chub, and Bradshaw's Lomatium, and over 700 acres of floodplain and riparian habitats to benefit migratory birds and listed salmonids. Through the WRP agreement over 2500 acres of wetlands have been restored, many that incorporate key habitat features for listed plants and fish.

Under Steve's direction, the Willamette Valley Partners for Fish and Wildlife private lands program has focused on reducing the negative affects of habitat fragmentation and degradation of key habitat types for rare and listed species and declining habitat types (wetland and wet prairie, oak savanna and upland prairie, and floodplain habitats). Steve's approach has been to restore habitat complexes and dispersal corridors on private lands surrounding core species population areas and highly functional habitat on refuge and other public or preserved lands. Steve has provided exceptional landowner technical assistance, empowering individuals to become more involved in a making ecologically wise land management and land use decisions. He has helped bring a wide variety of agencies and programs together to provide a seamless integration of program delivery and improved landowner services. He has also worked to incorporate key habitat and species needs into the landuse planning and restoration approaches of other agencies programs, many which previously had not addressed these listed species habitat issues.

**Innovative Aspects.**

Steve helped develop a multi-agency site assessment form to ensure that the habitat elements of the target species and natural community types would be universally recognized and that resultant project actions would properly address these issues. This has resulted in better coordination among funding programs and agency personnel, has increased efficiency for landowner access to technical and financial assistance, has directed more attention and funding to these species and habitats through increased awareness of their presence and value, and has improved the on-the-ground results for them. Steve was also instrumental in an effort to obtain increased focus and funding for establishing a source of genotype appropriate local native seed necessary to restore upland and wetland prairie habitats. This effort resulted in successfully obtaining Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program funds to enhance over 650 acres of prairies located within existing WRP sites. The NRCS selected this project as one of 6 nationwide. Steve's efforts also helped launch a creative partnership with the NRCS' Plant Materials Center, the Native Seed Network, the Service, and several others to leverage nearly \$200,000 to initiate a four-year native seed collection and propagation effort to focus on key habitat matrix species needed for listed species recovery.

**A Catalyst for Conservation.**

Over 96% of the land in the Willamette Valley is in private ownership. Many decades of agriculture and urbanization has resulted in fragmented and degraded habitat types and the subsequent imperilment of many of the species (some of which are endemic to the valley) dependent on these habitats. A cooperative, partnership-based restoration initiative was necessary to engage large numbers of private landowners and bring together a multitude of public and private resources to focus on these resource issues. Steve has been the primary catalyst that has been able to bring many agencies and non-profit groups together, despite disparate missions and program goals, and create a strong partnership focused on achieving mutual success, habitat restoration, and species recovery. Steve has been able to engage all types of landowners: local governments, hobby farmers, industrial grass seed growers, forestry lands, the grape industry and others to create interest and excitement for incorporating oak savanna/upland prairie or wet prairie/wetland habitat features -including listed species- into their land use decisions.

**Education and Outreach Aspects.**

The restoration efforts, in particular, Steve's work have been featured in the Conservation Incentives (Fall 2005) and in several local newspaper articles. Steve's ability to engage landowners has resulted in more than 60 site visits to new properties each year. He helps landowners achieve an increased understanding of the species composition and functional values of their lands, creating an understanding of the ecological processes and engaging these landowners as lifetime partners in the stewardship of their lands. This has the effect of increasing the percentage of the public that have a high ecological understanding of the natural communities in the Willamette Valley, as well as the species, both common and rare, that use them. Some property owners have opened their lands to local school groups and others to be used as 'living laboratories'; one has even used his land as a model for other industrial farmers to show the compatibility of farming and natural community/restoration - including the economic benefits of diversifying their land base. The Willamette Valley effort has also engaged the

educational and outreach capacities of numerous land trusts and other non-governmental organizations.

**Nontraditional Partnerships.**

Steve's work through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program is part of a large-scale restoration initiative that enjoys broad-based public support to restore diversity, contribute to recovery of listed species (including potential down and de-listings), benefit key migratory bird habitats, enhance valuable open space, and preserve the character of the Willamette Valley in a manner compatible with its present day uses. Steve has helped engage the involvement of broad stakeholder groups including numerous private landowners, locally led watershed councils, non-profit land trusts, SWCD's, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), NRCS, as well as City and County open space and parks programs. The agreements with ODFW (to share equipment) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (to implement WRP) vastly increase our capability to deliver technical assistance and implement restoration projects and conservation programs.